



## **Exhibit A**

file:///c:/APPS/preexam/correspondence/1.htm

Bib Data Sheet

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Patent and Trademark OfficeAddress: COMMISSIONER OF PATENTS AND TRADEMARKS  
Washington, D.C. 20231

SERIAL NUMBER 60/199,341	FILING DATE 04/24/2000 RULE	CLASS -	GROUP ART UNIT -	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO. A791.12-0004
APPLICANTS Steven R. Stromberg, Scandia, MN ;				
** CONTINUING DATA *****				
** FOREIGN APPLICATIONS *****				
IF REQUIRED, FOREIGN FILING LICENSE GRANTED ** SMALL ENTITY ** ** 06/24/2000				
Foreign Priority claimed 35 USC 119 (a-d) conditions met Verified and Acknowledged		<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/> Met after Allowance Examiner's Signature Initials	STATE OR COUNTRY MN	SHEETS DRAWING - TOTAL CLAIMS - INDEPENDENT CLAIMS -
ADDRESS Kinney & Lange PA The Kinney & Lange Building 312 South Third Street Minneapolis, MN 55415-1002				
TITLE Electronic product information System and method for retail direct marketing catalog users: a customized search engine				
FILING FEE RECEIVED 75	FEES: Authority has been given in Paper No. _____ to charge/credit DEPOSIT ACCOUNT No. _____ for following:		<input type="checkbox"/> All Fees <input type="checkbox"/> 1.16 Fees ( Filing ) <input type="checkbox"/> 1.17 Fees ( Processing Ext. of time ) <input type="checkbox"/> 1.18 Fees ( Issue ) <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Credit _____	

PATENT APPLICATION SERIAL NO. \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE  
FEE RECORD SHEET

04/28/2000 ZABRAHA1 00000099 60199341

01 FC:214

75.00 OP

PTO-1556  
(5/87)

\*U.S. GPO: 1998-458-082/19144



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
Patent and Trademark Office

ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND COMMISSIONER  
OF PATENTS AND TRADEMARKS  
Washington, D.C. 20231

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS/POWER OF ATTORNEY

FILE LOCATION 9200 SERIAL NUMBER 60199341 PATENT NUMBER

THE CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS HAS BEEN CHANGED TO CUSTOMER # 164

THE PRACTITIONERS OF RECORD HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO CUSTOMER # 164

THE FEE ADDRESS HAS BEEN CHANGED TO CUSTOMER # 164

ON 09/26/01 THE ADDRESS OF RECORD FOR CUSTOMER NUMBER 164 IS:

KINNEY & LANGE, P.A.  
THE KINNEY & LANGE BUILDING  
312 SOUTH THIRD STREET  
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55415-1002

AND THE PRACTITIONERS OF RECORD FOR CUSTOMER NUMBER 164 ARE:

26047	26316	30214	30514	37235	37258	38142	39627	39727	43589
43667	43724	45971	46678	46811	47420				

## BEST AVAILABLE COPY

PTO INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTION WHEN THE CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS HAS BEEN CHANGED TO CUSTOMER NUMBER: RECORD, ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE CONTENTS LINE OF THE FILE JACKET, 'ADDRESS CHANGE TO CUSTOMER NUMBER'. LINE THROUGH THE OLD ADDRESS ON THE FILE JACKET LABEL AND ENTER ONLY THE 'CUSTOMER NUMBER' AS THE NEW ADDRESS. FILE THIS LETTER IN THE FILE JACKET. WHEN ABOVE CHANGES ARE ONLY TO FEE ADDRESS AND/OR PRACTITIONERS OF RECORD, FILE LETTER IN THE FILE JACKET. THIS FILE IS ASSIGNED TO GAU 0000.

Apr 24 00 03:25p

Steven Stromberg

651-433-3093

p. 2

Apr. 24. 2000 3:14PM

KIN: LANGE, P. A.

No. 4525 P. 3

## STATEMENT OF SMALL ENTITY STATUS (INDEPENDENT INVENTOR)

Attorney Docket No.

A791.12-0004

First Named Inventor: Steven R. Stromberg

Title: ELECTRONIC PRODUCT INFORMATION SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR RETAIL  
DIRECT MARKETING/CATALOG USERS: A CUSTOMIZED "SEARCH ENGINE"

With respect to the invention described in:

- ☒ the application filed herewith:  
— Application No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed \_\_\_\_\_  
— Patent No. \_\_\_\_\_, issued \_\_\_\_\_

### I. STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATION AS A SMALL ENTITY

I am a below named independent inventor and I qualify as an independent inventor as defined in 37 C.F.R. 1.9(c) for purposes of paying reduced fees under 35 U.S.C. 41(a) and (b).

### II. STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP

Rights under contract or law remain with me. If the rights held are not exclusive, each individual, concern or organization having rights to the invention is listed below and no rights to the invention are held by any person who could not be classified as (1) an independent inventor under 37 C.F.R. 1.9(c) if that person had made the invention, (2) a small business concern under 37 C.F.R. 1.9(d) or (3) a non-profit organization under 37 C.F.R. 1.9(e).

- ☒ There is no such person, concern or organization.  
— The person(s), concern(s) or organization(s) is listed below:

FULL NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Individual  
☐ Small Business Concern  
☐ Non-Profit Organization

### III. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DUTY TO NOTIFY PTO OF STATUS CHANGE

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status pursuant to 37 C.F.R. 1.28(b).

### IV. SIGNATURES

Signature: Steven R. Stromberg  
Steven R. Stromberg

Date: 4/24/00

Received Time: Apr. 24. 3:24PM

04/24/00  
35796 U.S. PTO

# FEE TRANSMITTAL

Total Amount of Payment: \$75.00

## METHOD OF PAYMENT (Check One)

1. ☒ The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fee required under 37 C.F.R. 1.16 and 1.17 and credit any over payments to Deposit Account No. 11-0982.  
Deposit Account Name: Kinney & Lange, P.A.

2. ☒ Check Enclosed

## FEE CALCULATION

### 1. BASIC FILING FEE

Large Entity Fee Code	Large Entity Fee (\$)	Small Entity Fee Code	Small Entity Fee (\$)	Fee Description
101	690	201	345	<input type="checkbox"/> Utility Filing Fee
106	310	206	155	<input type="checkbox"/> Design Filing Fee
108	690	208	345	<input type="checkbox"/> Reissue Filing Fee
114	150	214	75	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prov. Filing Fee

Subtotal (1) \$75.00

### 2. EXTRA CLAIM FEES

	Number Claims	Prior**	Extra	Fee from Below	Fee Paid
Total	*	*	X	*	*
Indep.	*	*	X	*	*
Multiple Dependent Claims				*	*

\*\*Insert 3 and 20, or number previously paid if greater; Reissue see below

Large Entity Fee Code	Large Entity Fee (\$)	Small Entity Fee Code	Small Entity Fee (\$)	Description
103	18	203	9	Claims in excess of 20
102	78	202	39	Independent claims in excess of 3
104	260	204	130	Multiple Dependent Claim
109	78	209	39	Reissue Independent Claims Over Original Patent
110	18	210	9	Reissue claims in excess of 20 and over original patent

Subtotal (2) \$0.00

Complete if Known

Application No.	
Filing Date	April 24, 2000
First Named Inventor	Steven R. Stromberg
Group Art Unit	
Examiner Name	
Atty. Docket Number	A791.12-0004

## FEE CALCULATION (Continued)

### 3. ADDITIONAL FEES

Large Entity Fee Code	Large Entity Fee (\$)	Small Entity Fee Code	Small Entity Fee (\$)	Fee Description	Fee paid
105	130	205	65	Surcharge - Late filing fee or oath	*
127	50	227	25	Surcharge - Late provisional filing fee or cover sheet	*
139	130	139	130	Non-English specification	*
147	2,520	147	2,520	For Filing a Request for Reexamination	*
115	110	215	55	Extension for reply within first month	*
116	380	216	190	Extension for reply within second month	*
117	870	217	435	Extension for reply within third month	*
118	1,360	218	680	Extension for reply within fourth month	*
128	1,850	228	925	Extension for reply within fifth month	*
120	300	220	150	Filing a brief in support of an appeal	*
121	260	221	130	Request for oral hearing	*
148	110	248	55	Terminal Disclaimer Fee	*
140	110	240	55	Petition to revive - unevoldable	*
141	1,320	241	660	Petition to revive - unintentional	*
142	1,240	242	620	Utility/Reissue issue fee (inc. advance copies)	*
143	460	243	230	Design Issue fee (inc. advance copies)	*
122	130	122	130	Petitions to the Commissioner	*
123	50	123	50	Petitions related to provisional applications	*
126	240	126	240	Submission of Information Disclosure Statement	*
581	40	581	40	Recording each patent assignment per properly (times number of properties)	*

Other fee (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Subtotal (3) \$0.00

Signature

*John A. Holmen*  
John A. Holmen

Reg. No.

38,492

Date

4/24/00

Deposit Account No.

11-0982

PTO/SS-51 (7-93)

Approved for use through January 2004. PMS 00000001  
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552), no person is required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

## REQUEST FOR ACCESS TO AN ABANDONED APPLICATION UNDER 37 CFR 1.14

Bring completed form to:  
File Information Unit  
Crystal Plaza Three, Room 1001  
2021 South Clark Place  
Arlington, VA  
Telephone: (703) 306-2733

In re: Application of

Application Number

60/199,341

Filed

4.24.00

Paper No. 2

I hereby request access under 37 CFR 1.14(a)(1)(iv) to the application file record of the above-identified ABANDONED application, which is identified in, or to which a benefit is claimed, in the following document (as shown in the attachment):

United States Patent Application Publication No. 2002/007322, page(s) \_\_\_\_\_, line(s) \_\_\_\_\_

United States Patent Number \_\_\_\_\_, column \_\_\_\_\_, line(s) \_\_\_\_\_ or

WIPO Pub. No. \_\_\_\_\_, page \_\_\_\_\_, line \_\_\_\_\_

## Related information about Access to Pending Applications (37 CFR 1.14):

Direct access to pending applications is not available to the public but copies may be available and may be purchased from the Office of Public Records upon payment of the appropriate fee (37 CFR 1.19(b)), as follows:

For published applications that are still pending, a member of the public may obtain a copy of:

- the file contents;
- the pending application as originally filed; or
- any document in the file of the pending application.

For unpublished applications that are still pending:

- (1) If the benefit of the pending application is claimed under 35 U.S.C. 119(e), 120, 121, or 365 in another application that has: (a) issued as a U.S. patent, or (b) published as a statutory invention registration, a U.S. patent application publication, or an international patent application publication in accordance with PCT Article 21(2), a member of the public may obtain a copy of:

- the file contents;
- the pending application as originally filed; or
- any document in the file of the pending application.

- (2) If the application is incorporated by reference or otherwise identified in a U.S. patent, a statutory invention registration, a U.S. patent application publication, or an international patent application publication in accordance with PCT Article 21(2), a member of the public may obtain a copy of:

- the pending application as originally filed.

Signature

Typed or printed name

Registration Number, if applicable

521.6525

Telephone Number

Date

1.15.04

FOR PTO USE ONLY

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Approved by:

JAN 15 2004

Unit:

File Information Unit

This collection of information is required by 37 CFR 1.14. The information is required to obtain or retain a benefit by the publication in the file (and by the USPTO in process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This collection is estimated to take 10 minutes to complete, including in the process of gathering and submitting the completed application form to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the collection should be sent to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the collection should be sent to the USPTO.

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Jan 13 04 03:21P  
JCT96 U.S. PTO  
04/24/00

Our Docket No.: A791.12-0004

# PROVISIONAL PATENT APPLICATION

ENTITLED:

ELECTRONIC PRODUCT INFORMATION  
SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR RETAIL  
DIRECT MARKETING/CATALOG USERS:  
A CUSTOMIZED "SEARCH ENGINE"

JCS41 U.S. PTO  
60/199341  
04/24/00

INVENTOR(S):

NAME	CITY, STATE AND ZIP
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## CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

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## ENCLOSURES

- ☒ Specification; Number of Pages 7
- ☐ Drawings; Number of Sheets
- ☒ A check in the amount of \$ 75.00
- ☒ Small Entity Statement
- ☐ Assignment and Patent Recordation Form Cover Sheet

Respectfully submitted,

KINNEY & LANGE, P.A.

EL163362065US

By: Jeff A. Hal  
Jeff A. Halmen, Reg. No. 38,492

Express Mail No. EL163362065US

Date of Deposit: April 24, 2000



**ELECTRONIC PRODUCT INFORMATION SYSTEM  
AND METHOD FOR RETAIL DIRECT MARKETING/CATALOG USERS:  
A CUSTOMIZED "SEARCH ENGINE"**

**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

Direct marketing/catalog retail and business-to-business sales represent a significant percentage of commerce conducted in the worldwide marketplace. Despite recent development by many catalog distributors (Direct Marketers) of internet sites for conducting electronic commerce, the printed catalog will continue to play an important role in the overall marketing/communication mix for creating sales through this distinctive distribution channel.

A long-time limitation of printed catalog sales has been the restricted amount of space allowed for conveying essential product information to prospective customers shopping any given catalog. For most products and product categories, fractional space page units are used which are generally restricted to a product photo, limited descriptive copy and price. One could assume that internet catalog sites would overcome this problem by having the unlimited capacity to expand product information at relatively low cost. However, the same habits or customs from the printed catalog page have transferred into the electronic commerce field as witnessed by today's catalog web sites; limited space for sales copy continues to prevail.

With today's worldwide internet infrastructure, it is now possible to provide catalog customers with product information beyond the limitation of the printed page. By so doing, customers will gain more convenient access to additional product information that will prove helpful in making buying decisions through a catalog distributor (Direct Marketer).

While it is now possible to provide such convenient access to product information, the conflicting objectives between direct marketing catalog distributors and their respective vendors will not permit such exploitation of the communication power of the internet. Only through an independent third party service provider can such a service be realized.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Within the pages of a printed catalog, selective product items by participating vendors are foot-noted with a special graphic icon to invite customers to an independent, proprietary web site to view additional product information deemed useful in making a buying decision. Each catalog page is preferably headed with notice of this internet product information service with this special icon/logo next to each participating item number. In a preferred embodiment, an illustrated computer and magnifying glass with a caption, "Want to take a closer look? . . . [www.productinfofind.com](http://www.productinfofind.com)" is used. Other domain addresses could be used for the web site such as [www.productinfoseek.com](http://www.productinfoseek.com), [www.productinfosearch.com](http://www.productinfosearch.com), [www.productinfoquest.com](http://www.productinfoquest.com), or [www.productinfofind.com](http://www.productinfofind.com).

The unique design of this web site brings the customer first to the home page of the above-mentioned domain which prompts the customer to type in the name of the catalog they are using. (This home page also preferably has banner advertising available for an additional revenue source.) This leads them to the "sub-home page" of the catalog Direct Marketer (also carrying banner advertising) which then prompts the customer to enter the product item number (directly off the catalog page). The customer's computer screen then brings up the customized "vendor page" providing additional information about the specific product of interest. More product pictures and harder selling descriptive copy can be conveyed via this vendor page. In a preferred embodiment, video product demonstrations are given, providing a much more powerful selling advantage. Customer testimonials and other useful selling messages could be communicated via this customized vendor page. Overall, the added strength of this unique communication tool is helpful to the customer's buying decision.

After viewing the vendor page, the customer is invited into the direct marketer's web site to place an order with a direct link to this web site. This promotes the use of such electronic commerce to reduce the cost of the sales transaction for the direct marketer. The customer can also choose to go back to the catalog "sub-home page" to enter in additional catalog product item numbers to view other products (vendor pages) found in this catalog.

Attempting to view competitive catalogs (on the part of the catalog customer) will not be possible because the user must have the catalog item number from the catalog they are using in order

to link to a vendor page with the product information they seek. Protecting the direct marketer from competitive conflicts is important in order to protect the integrity of this internet product information system and method.

A key feature of the web-based communication system supporting catalog sales described herein is the use of third party action. While vendors would welcome the opportunity to list their web address in their catalog product listings, the catalog direct marketer would not allow this due to the loss of control over their customers' actions. Vendor web sites could lead customers to competitors or even invite direct sales by the vendor to the customer, thus possibly cutting the catalog direct marketer out of the sale.

Individual catalog companies could provide this same service to their vendors with a similar design. However, they are not likely to be a driving force for such a communication service for reasons cited previously. More importantly, adding such an element to their web site would clutter it up and slow down the customer's ability to scan the catalog offerings. This would be a direct conflict of objectives for the direct marketer. If they were inclined to provide this service in a manner similar to that described herein, the vendor would be expected to pay for the costs. The web-based product information system and method described herein will be able to deliver this service with a much higher degree of cost efficiency due to the third party's ability to spread the cost of this service across multiple vendors, catalogs, and non-related (non-competitive) industries.

Creative content and selling impact will also be enhanced because the system and method described herein hands this control and responsibility directly over to the vendor. Traditionally, this has not been the case in the past. Catalog distributors, for the most part, determine the final content and design of any catalog listing. Vendors know the products far better, have superior selling knowledge and experience, and employ their own creative/communication resources to deliver high impact selling communication. However, vendors' web page content will be restricted in ways that will prevent competitive conflicts with their direct marketing distributor partners.

One of the key elements of this invention is a sophisticated on-line data base (a customized "search engine") that manages information controlling all of the vendor web pages and their links with their respective catalog direct marketers. Because of the third party control, this data base will open itself up to a variety of secure future applications that will facilitate instant access to product

information for the benefit of the consumer and vendor. This will assist the consumer in making buying decisions in a variety of retail and/or other buying environments, over and above the printed catalog page, such as the following.

Retail Point-of Purchase (POP):

A key element in the communication system and method described herein is the deployment of point-of-purchase (POP) application at the retail store level. Customers exploring retail store shelves often find it difficult to get product information assistance. In addition, finding a "product knowledgeable" sales clerk is often a challenge (or non-existent). With computer monitors strategically placed within a retail store environment, customers can either barcode scan a product or type in the skew number (barcode number) via the direct link to [www.productinfolink.com](http://www.productinfolink.com). Access to this product information is not only valuable to the retail customer, but also to retail store clerks to enhance their ability to detail a product for the benefit of a customer (and the vendor). Vendors will highly value this unique opportunity.

Retail stores are also able to link this activity to other possible sources of information such as inventory availability, in-store coupons or manufacturer rebate programs, etc. In a preferred embodiment, this happens through an adapted, customized data base for POP retail use only.

Co-op Advertising:

Beyond the use within the printed catalog page, this web-based product information source will also be used in co-op advertising. When retailers run advertising in magazines or newspapers, they often will seek co-op advertising dollars from their vendors. By using [www.productinfolink.com](http://www.productinfolink.com) - linked vendors, more coop dollars can be attracted with the added value provided to the vendor. This can also work in reverse by vendors being able to offer a stronger co-op program by participating in this program.

The same product information benefit will be available in this retail advertising environment as described above with the catalog pages. It will have particular value with relatively new product introductions that especially lend themselves to product demonstration (via the web-based vendor page link with video capabilities.)

### Web-Based E-Commerce:

Most catalog distributors have either started e-commerce web sites or are about to embark on this new strategy for increasing sales and decreasing selling costs. Product content will affect the download time for users and must be brief to facilitate ease of movement through the site for the customer (to avoid "clutter fatigue"). For this reason, catalog distributors will want to be brief with the product information content within their web site. However, if they do provide a quick link to [www.productinfo.link.com](http://www.productinfo.link.com), their customers will be able to secure additional product information that may make the difference between a sale or no sale. This approach will have the same safeguards employed as with the printed catalog version in order to avoid competitive conflicts. It will also enhance the sales effectiveness of their web site to the benefit of the customer, distributor/retailer and vendor.

Equally important, linking this service from electronic commerce sites will open up the availability of this product information source to distributors who are new on the scene with e-commerce sites, have no history of a printed catalog sales presence and no intention of getting into the printed catalog business.

The system and method described herein provides a "win-win" strategy. Vendors would value this third party web-based system and method for a variety of reasons. For the first time, they would have optimum control over the editorial format and content of their selling message via their vendor page (since they are paying for this service; certainly vendor pages would have restrictions to prevent competitive conflicts with the catalog or retail store distributor.) Vendors would also be able to increase the selling strength and potential of retail outlets and catalog distribution by strengthening the selling message; increased sales should result.

Vendors may also realize a point-of-purchase display opportunity at their retail store outlets. In a preferred embodiment, participating retail stores have computer screens with internet access positioned in the store allowing customers to check out this product information site to assist in their buying decision. Retail stores will prefer this approach over promoting the individual vendor's web address for the same reason cited previously. With the right data base system, this process may be speeded up by bar-code scanning the product, causing a direct link to the vendor page on the web-based system described herein.

Vendors will also be able to use their vendor pages for supplemental product information access for their on-line catalog marketers who do not have printed catalogs. On these web sites, there is preferably a link directly to the vendor page from the on-line site where the product is listed. This system saves the on-line direct marketer set-up time and memory space with similar protection afforded to the printed catalog marketers from competitive conflicts. It also eliminates the "clutter fatigue" that can result from too much copy/pictorial space on the computer monitor screen. Assuming no or little cost involved, providing this service at no charge to the on-line marketers will provide added value for participating vendors. This will permit them to exploit this product information access beyond their printed catalog marketer customers.

Catalog direct marketers will also benefit from the increased sales that would result from this strengthened product information system. In addition, their printed catalog customers would be naturally led into their web site, increasing the percentage of commerce conducted electronically, thus reducing sales transaction costs. Catalog direct marketers would also benefit from the new revenue source that would result (in exchange for the necessary cooperation that would be required between the third party service provider and the catalog distributor). This defraying of printing and postage costs would be most welcomed by direct marketers.

This product information system and method can also enhance catalog direct marketer's use of their respective web sites. Rather than the catalog web sites taking the time and devoting the memory space required for vendor page equivalents (for higher impact selling messages), they can simply (at no cost) provide a link to this information on the web-based system, which will then immediately return the customer back to the catalog web site.

Since this third party service provider can spread the cost of this service out over multiple vendors and catalog direct marketers within a given industry (by deploying the vendor page into other catalog sub-home pages within this web-based system), no single catalog company could conceivably compete on price with the third party internet product information service provider.

In summary, traditional printed catalog sales will be greatly enhanced by the availability of the unique product information service provided by the independent third party proprietary internet web-based system described herein. Retail locations will also be able to exploit this product information system and method along with retail co-op advertising potential. To-date, no catalog

operations or other retailers are known to be deploying a similar concept, either independently or through any cooperative effort. Customers will be better served and sales success enhanced for both the catalog distributor and their respective vendors. The bottom line is improved marketing product communications for increased commerce.

Since virtually all niche markets for consumer and business-to-business products are served through catalog distributors, the reach of this innovative internet web-based system could potentially be immense and immediate. Hundreds of catalog operations are served by tens of thousands of vendors, all of which will have an interest in this powerful new sales communication tool. The follow-on retail store use further builds the potential for generating new promotional/product communication services.

Franchising the data-base software and concept of the present invention to other interested parties is possible. Such potential may include the likes of a Sears and JC Penney catalog that, for the most part, carry private label products which would preclude use of the general vendor product information data base. In addition, franchise opportunities may exist to exploit smaller niche markets yet to be discovered.